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Crane, J. F.,

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The Dante Library.

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TO

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1893-1894

by

Thomas Frederick Crane.

(From the Cornell Magazine, May, 1894)

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THE DANTE LIBRARY

PRESENTED BY

WILLARD FISKE

TO

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

(From the Cornell Magazine, May, 1894)

WITHIN the last two years the Library of Cornell University has received as gifts three splendid collections: the Zarncke library, (so admirably described in the January number of this magazine by Miss Crandall), the gift of Mr. W. H. Sage, the Rhæto-Romanic collection and the Dante library, the two last named the gift of Mr. Willard Fiske. I hope to say something later in regard to the Rhæto-Romanic collection, the third largest in existence, (the catalogue of which has just been published and fills thirty-two pages of two columns each), and pass on now to a brief account of the Dante library as being of more general interest.

Dante Alighieri died at Ravenna the 14th of September, 1321, leaving besides the work entitled by him "Commedia," but to which admiring posterity prefixed the adjective "Divina," (the poet was first called *divino* in the edition of 1481, with the comment of Landino, and the first edition on the title page of which the word *divina* appeared was that of Venice, 1555, Giolito), a number of miscellaneous writings in prose and verse, and in Latin as well as in Italian. It is not probable that the Divine Comedy was divulged to any great extent during the lifetime of the author (the third part, Paradise, was not completed until the very year

of his death), but immediately after his death it became known and awakened a boundless enthusiasm which manifested itself in the establishment of lectureships, (in Florence in 1373, first filled by Boccaccio), the composition of commentaries and the multiplication of texts. With the invention of printing (the first printed edition of the Divine Comedy is 1472, Foligno, Numeister), an immense impetus was given to Dante studies, and from that day to the present time the presses of the world have teemed with editions of the immortal poem and with works written for its elucidation. For the Divine Comedy is not only a poem of matchless beauty of form and contents, but is also a great ethical work requiring for its comprehension some knowledge of the author's religious and political systems. Nay more, it is an encyclopædia of the learning of the day, a synthesis of the later middle ages, embodying the historical, philosophical, and literary knowledge of Dante's day. This will explain why it soon became difficult to comprehend the Divine Comedy without some kind of a commentary. No great poetical work was ever so local as Dante's; it is filled with an infinite number of allusions to contemporaries, some of which escaped even the earliest commentators, and it abounds with obscure references to mythology, astronomy, ancient history, ecclesiastical history, legends of the church, scholastic philosophy, etc. Above all, besides the literal acceptance of the work, there is an allegorical one which demands the profoundest study and has given rise to an enormous literature.

Then, too, the life of the poet early attracted attention (there are four biographies of the XIVth century), and has produced a large number of works dealing with the history of Florence and Italy in the XIIIth and XIVth centuries..

The pictorial side of the Divine Comedy afforded ample opportunity for illustration, and miniatures in manuscripts and engravings in printed editions endeavored to supplement commentary and present to the eye the marvellous creations of the poet's brain.

The reader can perhaps conjecture from what has been said the vast extent of the literature connected with Dante and his works, and it should also be clear that although relating to one writer it really embraces the history and literature of Italy during the middle ages, besides illustrating the typography and art of the country for over five hundred years.

The collection of works on Dante has naturally engaged the attention of Italian scholars everywhere. In this country Harvard has long been noted for its precious collection of works on Dante, until recently the largest in the United States. The presence of Longfellow, Norton, both translators of Dante, and Lowell, whose essay on Dante is still the best, gave an impulse to Dante studies which resulted in the formation of a Dante society and the collection of a large and valuable library there.

The American student of Dante must now, however, wend his way to Cornell, for the most important Dante library in the world, with the possible exception of the collection in the Biblioteca Nazionale at Florence, is now at Ithaca. As long ago as 1881, Mr. Willard Fiske, then Librarian of Cornell University, became interested in Italian literature, and began his famous Petrarch collection, now the largest and most valuable in existence. When that collection was relatively completed, Mr. Fiske turned his attention to the field of Rhaeto-Romanic literature and presented to Cornell the remarkable collection alluded to at the beginning of this article. Book collecting had become a habit with Mr. Fiske, and last year he turned his attention to Dante, the largest and most difficult field he had yet entered. Those who would like to see how one goes to work to get together a great collection of books on any given subject should read the prefatory note to the catalogue of Rhaeto-Romanic literature just published. To succeed in this difficult undertaking one must have time and money and knowledge of the subject and of the great book-marts of the world. All these Mr. Fiske possessed, and in six months he had sent to Ithaca nearly two thousand volumes and in a little over a year he had increased the number to three thousand, more than double the number in the Harvard collection.* As Alceste says to Oronte in the *Misanthrope*: "Voyons, Monsieur, le temps ne fait rien à l'affaire;" but it does in this case prove an extraordinary knowledge of bibliography and an unrivalled acquaintance with the whereabouts of old books. It also shows the superiority of the individual collector over the Library. No library in the world could possibly have made such a collection in so short a time.

* It is impossible to give now the exact number and distribution of the collection, as books are constantly arriving and the collection is not yet catalogued or definitely arranged on the shelves.

It is very difficult to give in the brief space at my command even the most superficial account of a collection, of which the mere titles would fill a good-sized volume. I shall try, however, to convey some idea of the importance of this remarkable collection to the students of Dante in America. First then as to the Divine Comedy and its early editions. The collection contains the rare *editio princeps*, referred to above, printed at Foligno in 1472 by Numeister. The value of this particular copy is greatly enhanced by the fact that it contains numerous and extensive annotations by Luca Pulci, brother of the more famous Luigi, author of the *Morgante Maggiore*. There were two other editions of 1472, one of Mantua, and one of Jesi, and an edition of Naples anterior to 1477. These three last named are of excessive rariety (there is no copy of the Naples edition in Italy), and are not in the Fiske collection. They were reproduced by Lord Vernon, together with the *editio princeps* of Foligno, in a splendid volume printed at London in 1854, of which there is a copy in the Cornell Library presented by the family of the editor. There are in the Fiske collection eight other editions prior to 1500; viz., Venice, 1477, with the commentary attributed to Benvenuto da Imola, but really by Jacopo della Lana of Bologna; Florence, 1481, first edition of Landino's commentary; Venice, 1484, second edition of Landino; Brescia, 1487, with Landino's commentary and much prized for its many handsome full-page woodcuts; Venice, 1491, Benali; Venice, 1491, Petro Cremonese; Venice, 1493; Venice, 1497, all containing Landino's commentary and illustrated with woodcuts.

Of the many editions of the sixteenth century all but three or four (one counterfeit Aldine of the 1515 edition and rarer than the original, and two or three other editions, Venice, 1545, 1550, al segno della Speranza, all excessively rare) are in the Fiske collection. They are: the rare first Aldine of 1502 with the anchor at the end, and its still rarer counterfeit issued probably in the same year from the press of Bartolomeo Troth in Lyons; Florence, 1506; Toscolano, 1506; Venice, 1507; Venice, 1512; Venice, 1515; Toscolano, 1516; Venice, 1520; Toscolano, 1521; Venice, 1529; Venice, 1536; Venice, 1544; Lyons, 1547; Lyons, 1552, Rovillio, the same as the edition of 1551 with change of date; Venice,

1554; Venice, 1555 (it is in this edition as has already been remarked that the word *divina* appears for the first time upon the title page); Venice, 1564; Venice, 1568 (the sole edition containing the esteemed commentary of Bernardino Daniello da Lucca); Venice, 1569; Lyons, 1571; Lyons, 1575; Venice, 1578, Sessa; Venice, 1578, Farri; Florence, 1595; Venice, 1596.

There was a lamentable lack of interest in Dante in the seventeenth century, and only three editions were published, all of which are in the Fiske collection; viz., Vicenza, 1613; Padua, 1629; Venice, 1629.

The numerous editions of the eighteenth century are all found in the collection with the exception of those of 1772 Venice, Zatta; 1784 Nuremberg; 1792; 1795 (2); 1796 Venice, Gatti; 1797; 1798 Venice, Zatta; and 1799. It would be impossible to mention the enormous number of editions of the present century, among which are several of the earlier commentators of Dante now printed for the first time; viz., Benvenuto da Imola (about 1380) Florence, 1887, 5 vols.; Friar Giovanni da Serravalle (1417) Prato, 1891; and Stefano Talice da Ricaldone (1474) Milan, 1888, 3 vols. It is to this century also that belong the first critical edition, a handsome quarto by Karl Witte, Berlin, 1862, and certain Dante curiosities; as, the Roveta edition of 1820 in which the *Inferno* is printed in white ink on dark purple paper, the *Purgatorio* in black ink on olive paper, and the *Paradiso* in black ink on white paper; and the two smallest editions of Dante: the Pickering diamond edition of 1823, and the microscopical edition of Milan, 1878, said to be printed from the smallest type ever used, with its companion volume *La Galleria Dantesca Microscopica*, Milan, 1880, containing 30 photographs of Scaramuzza's illustrations to the Divine Comedy.

As I have already said, the Divine Comedy early afforded scope for the illustrator's art and many of the manuscripts contain designs, and most of the old editions, woodcuts. Preëminent among the former class are the superb drawings of Sandro Botticelli (1446-1570), contained in a MS. formerly belonging to the Duke of Hamilton and now the property of the Prussian government. These illustrations (in pen and silver point) were reproduced in a splendid volume printed at Berlin in 1887. Next to

Botticelli's designs stand those of the Flemish artist, Johannes Stradanus, executed in 1587 (in water color, sepia, and pen and ink), and reproduced in London in 1892. These are in the Fiske collection together with the illustrations of Doré, Flaxman, Genelli, Scaramuzza, Pinelli, Traquair, and others, together with such special works as the recent *Dante in der deutschen Kunst*, Dresden, 1890, containing 24 phototype reproductions of German drawings and pictures belonging to the late King of Saxony, (author, under the pseudonym of Philalethes, of one of the best German translations and commentary), and never before published. There is besides a large portfolio containing many portraits of Dante.

Next to the texts, comments and illustrations, may be mentioned the translations which have been made of the Divine Comedy. The Fiske collection contains all the principal translations into Armenian, Bohemian, Catalan, Danish, Dutch, French, German, modern Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, the Italian dialects (Milanese, Veronese, Calabrese, Neapolitan, and Venetian), Latin, Polish, Russian, Sanskrit (the episode of the death of Count Ugolino), Spanish, Swedish, and a specimen of a translation in Volapük, while the series of English translations is an almost unbroken one, from Boyd's in 1802 to Parsons's, Sullivan's and Musgrave's in 1893. Among the most interesting of the older translations of the Divine Comedy is the Spanish one by Villegas, Burgos, 1515, like all early printed Spanish books, remarkable for its typography and extreme rarity.

Besides texts, comments, illustrated editions and translations, the Fiske collection is exceedingly rich in works relating to Dante himself, his age and his works, including complete sets of Dante periodicals, journals of Dante societies, articles in other periodicals, as well as novels, stories, dramas and poems based upon Dante's own life, or upon episodes from his immortal work; and musical compositions and miscellaneous engravings.

No one who has not studied the bibliographies of Dante can have any idea of the enormous mass of writings of every kind and extent called forth by the Divine Comedy as a whole, and by detached portions of it. There is scarcely a verse that has not given rise to discussion and publication. Many of these publications are

extremely rare, consisting of privately printed tracts or occasional publications. The curious and, in some respects, laudable custom prevails in Italy of publishing on the occasion of a marriage some work in a small number of copies, which are distributed among what the American journals call "the high contracting parties," and their friends. These works are never for sale, and like other wedding presents get into commerce only on the death of the recipients. It is impossible to give even an idea of the wealth of the Fiske collection in works of this kind, two examples, out of many, may, however, prove of interest.

In the fifth canto of the *Inferno* among the carnal sinners is placed Semiramis, of whom Dante in the accepted text says (v. 59):

Che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa.

which means that she succeeded her husband on the throne. However irregular this proceeding might have been in view of the fact that her son was the legitimate successor of his father, it would not seem to bring out into relief the particular wickedness for which Semiramis was punished in this circle. As early as the fifteenth century an attempt to correct the text was made by a famous preacher of the day Paolo Attavanti, a Florentine, who in a Lenten sermon (published at Milan in 1479) says of Semiramis: "omnem famam suam denigravit, filium accipiendo in virum," etc., and quotes the verse in question as follows:

Che suger dette a Nino e fu sua sposa,

with the remark: "quasi dicat illa est Semiramis luxuriosissima que habuit in virum Ninum, quem lactaverat," etc. Although this reading was afterwards found in a number of manuscripts, it does not seem to have attracted notice until the Abbé Federici, vice-librarian of the university library at Padua, in making a card catalogue came across a copy of Attavanti and was struck by the extensive use made by him of Dante, of whom he cites about 1254 verses (it seems probable that Attavanti had composed a commentary on Dante and incorporated part of it into his Lenten sermons). In 1836 Federici published a selection of the variants thus offered, among them the one cited above. Since then the discussion has been warm and extensive, and the discovery of this reading (at first supposed to be a piece of bad taste on the part of

the Florentine preacher) in a number of manuscripts, one at least earlier than Attavanti (Barlow, Crit. hist. and phil. contributions to the study of the Divine Comedy, London, 1864, p. 166, cites fourteen) has lately revived the discussion. The literature thus called forth is fully represented in the Fiske collection, which has a perfect copy of the very scarce work of Attavanti.

The other example above referred to of a typical Dante discussion is found in the mass of publications called forth by line 75 of Canto XXXIII. of the *Inferno*. Count Ugolino had been shut up to starve in prison at Pisa with his two sons and two grandsons. The unhappy father saw his children die one by one before him, and on the eighth day died himself, not from grief, but from hunger. The poet's words are :

Poscia più che il dolor, potè il digiuno.

As early as Landino reference was made to an interpretation which explained the verse by the revolting theory that hunger had driven Ugolino to devour his children's bodies. No further notice of this was taken until 1826, when at a dinner in Pisa the conversation fell on this verse, and one of the guests, Giovanni Carmignani, professor of criminal law, defended the early interpretation. This view was opposed by others present, and later Carmignani defended his opinion in a letter to his colleague Rosini. Another guest who had been present at the discussion, Tommaso Gargallo, published at Palermo in 1832, a "lezione academica" on the subject, and from that time to this the discussion has raged and will probably continue, as Manzoni says of the discussion between Don Abbondio and Renzo, "dei secoli, giacchè ognuna delle parti non faceva che replicare il suo proprio argomento." The Fiske collection contains the letter of Carmignani and most of the subsequent publications on the subject.

These are but two examples of a host ; volumes have been written on the allegorical meaning of the poem, on the "Veltro," (I., 101), on who it was that made the "great refusal," (III., 60), etc.

These two examples will, however, suffice to show the wealth of material contained in the collection, and what has been said refers only to the Divine Comedy. All the other works of Dante, however, are embraced in the collection and treated with equal care.

Among these are the rare *editio princeps* of the *Convito*, Florence, 1490, as well as the rare editions of Venice, 1521; Venice, 1529; Venice, 1531, *i. e.*, the first four editions. The *Vita Nuova* is represented by a paper manuscript dated Rome, 1515, and written by "Ia. Ant. Benalio, Trivigiano." This interesting MS. contains also 15 canzoni of Dante; canzoni of Guido di Messer Cavalcanti; canzoni and sonetti of Messer Cino da Pistoja; canzoni of Gitton d'Arezzo; and "Argomento in 75 terzetti della prima parte della commedia di Dante intitolata l'Inferno." The translations and illustrative works relating to Dante's miscellaneous writings are also fully represented in the collection.

It is intended to make this unrivalled collection useful as soon as possible to the American students of Dante by the publication of a catalogue worthy to take its place by the side of those already issued of the works on the Reformation, French Revolution and Rhæto-Romanic literature.

T. F. Crane.

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